



Kimberly A. Foster
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
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SANDRA RUDNICK
STACEY SAVELLE
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 16, 2009**, in Room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi	Sandra Rudnick
Patricia Curry	Stacey Savelle
Ann Franzen	Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Susan Friedman	Martha Trevino Powell
Helen Kleinberg	Adelina Sorkin
Rev. Cecil Murray	Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Tina Pedersen	Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Dr. La-Doris McClaney

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Sorkin, Chair.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Self introductions were made.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Action

A Motion by Commissioner Williams, seconded by Commissioner Worthy-Clayton, to approve the Agenda for March 16, 2009 was unanimously passed.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – MARCH 2, 2009

Action

A Motion by Commissioner Franzen, seconded by Commissioner Savelle, to approve the Minutes of March 2, 2009 was unanimously passed.

V. CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Sorkin presented a follow-up report on the DMH MHSA Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Allocation that Commissioner Kleinberg reported on at the February 2, 2009 Commission meeting. Chair Sorkin discussed the meeting Commissioner Kleinberg, Executive Director Kim Foster and she attended with stakeholders on March 9, 2009. The formula that was proposed by stakeholders was a 60/40 allocation – 60% population and 40% poverty. Commissioner Kleinberg indicated that the allocation is going to be reworked and re-voted on at the next meeting. Commissioner Kleinberg stated that it is imperative to have more children's delegates and stakeholders attend the meetings and vote. The next meeting is on March 25, 2009 and is very critical for allocating these funds.

Commissioner Friedman inquired of the impact the proposition that is on the May 19th ballot would have if passed. Commissioner Kleinberg stated that Mental Health and First 5 money would be placed in a general fund for two years, but again stressed that it is important to ensure that the money is allocated to the areas where children and families really need it.

Chair Sorkin expressed appreciation to Commissioners Kleinberg and Curry for representing the Commission at the Mental Health Services Act Stakeholders and Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team meetings.

Chair Sorkin also thanked Commissioner Trevino Powell for her work on the 25th Anniversary function. Commissioner Trevino Powell distributed 25 Anniversary packets with invitations and the budget to each Commissioner. Commissioner Biondi asked who has been invited by the Commission and Chair Sorkin stated that we have operated from the list previously distributed. A final list is available.

Chair Sorkin announced that Commissioner Rudnick, Vice Chair Curry and she attended the first Joint Children's Commissions meeting hosted by Sharon Watson, L.A. Children's Council on March 11, 2009. This was an introduction meeting where the nine invited Commissions discussed the similarities and the differences between the Commissions. They will begin to develop a plan to work together on joint children's projects. The next meeting is in April 2009.

Chair Sorkin attended the Innovation in Action: Healthy Homes, Healthy Kids seminar by the Center for Healthy Communities at the California Endowment. Highlights included a program that works with children on health and the environment in a holistic manner. They also discussed the importance of partnering and working together without duplicating efforts. Chair Sorkin brought newsletters entitled "Center Scene" to share with the Commission.

Chair Sorkin welcomed Miguel Santana, Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO). She shared a publication from 1984 of the Children's Services Task Force. The Task Force publication addressed issues such as:

- Providing comprehensive case management
- Improving the quality and delivery of social services to children and their families
- Public child welfare services constitute the community's first line of defense for troubled families and children at risk
- Services should be holistic.

The Task Force recommended creating the Commission for Children and Families to address these issues.

VI. COMMISSION PRIORITIES

Vice Chair Curry, in response to Miguel Santana's request at the October 6, 2008 Special (Retreat) Commission meeting presented the Commission's priorities. The 5 Focus Areas for the Commission are: 1) Transitional Age Youth (TAY), 2) Wellness, 3) Prevention, 4) Relative Care Providers, and 5) Crossover Youth. These areas have been long time priorities of the Commission. These areas were chosen specifically because they crossover all of the CEO clusters and will foster integration of services and blending of funds with County departments. The departments and clusters will be able to improve working relationships with the community to develop a continuum of care that is seamless.

Vice Chair Pedersen discussed the specific work of one of the Commission's Committees. The Commission presented recommendations to the Board and a Board Motion has been drafted and will be heard in April 2009 to address childhood obesity. Vice Chair Pedersen also discussed partnering with the CEO in the area of dental, which is another area that the Child Wellness Committee (formerly Childhood Obesity Committee) is looking at.

Miguel Santana inquired if mental health is included as a part of the Wellness Committee. Vice Chair Pedersen replied at this time that the Wellness Committee is focusing on obesity and dental, but are exploring whether to include mental health in the future. Chair Sorkin stated that mental health is included in and woven into all the areas of this population. Commissioners Curry and Kleinberg also discussed the Commissioners' involvement in many of the groups that deal with mental health issues and reassured Mr. Santana that the Commission is concerned with the mental health issues as well.

Mr. Santana also inquired if the Commission looks at children in terms of the child that has been touched by the system or any child in the County. Chair Sorkin replied that the

Commission's responsibility is to all children at risk. She related that in working with the department on primary, secondary and tertiary prevention children needing services should not be limited to those in the system but should include those in the community, on the porch, as well as in the house.

Vice Chair Olivas discussed the Commission's readiness to begin working together with the CEO on a plan and setting goals, making recommendations and timeframes for outcomes on the Commission's focus areas.

Commissioner Kleinberg also expressed how the Commission is anxious to begin working together with the CEO on to how to communicate, how to review data, how to be client oriented and how to integrate services, and to coordinate these efforts.

VII. DIALOGUE WITH DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Miguel Santana, DCEO, congratulated the Commission on their milestone and the achievements of the last 25 years. In the last 25 years, the County has gone from a poster child of how not to do things to the poster child of how to do things. The County has improved significantly in how to improve the lives of children in our care and reducing the number of children in our care, with the help of the Commission. Mr. Santana explained that he likes to look at issues and make them concrete, to look backwards from the perspective of a child and develop a strategy that changes the system as a whole. He considers that at the end of day, if the lives of children haven't been impacted then they haven't been successful. The strategic plan and the business plan tries to make all of the issues tangible, it is focused and deliberate with specific outcomes and timeframes. Mr. Santana stated that the Commission's 5 focus areas overlap well with the CEO's. Mr. Santana also discussed his principles, which are: 1) being focused, deliberate, and tangible; 2) making things simple; and 3) to achieve multiple goals with the same effort. Mr. Santana also stated that the integration of services is one of the most important issues and integration starts with us.

Mr. Santana applauded the efforts of the Children's Council in convening the different Children's Commissions to jointly define the role of each group, collaborate, and work together. He stated it is neither competitive nor political, just about servicing the kids.

Mr. Santana mentioned that Trish Ploehn, Director of DCFS, probably attends meetings 40 hours a week. She attends cluster meetings twice a week. Commissioner Biondi inquired if the cluster meetings are posted on the website for the public. Mr. Santana stated that the meetings are posted in the Public Information office every Friday but are not available on any website. He stated that the general public does not attend the meetings. He further clarified that he agrees that having the public involved is a good thing. He stated that he considers the public as the families that are in crisis, the 9,000 families a month that are denied CalWorks because they are not desperate enough, the families that are on the verge of homelessness or of abusing their children. These are the people that they haven't done a very good job of reaching out to and need to focus on how to better reach out to them.

Commissioner Friedman inquired whether they have plans to deal with the problems of the economy and its affects on child welfare. Mr. Santana stated that they had predictions of the recession and have been preparing since early last year. He stated that they have received projections that the unemployment rate in Los Angeles County will reach 15% in June 2010. The people that are seeking government help are the people who have never been there before. The County is denying 9,000 a month because these new applicants are not considered desperate enough (they still have a car, 401K, etc.). He stated that there is a direct correlation between General Relief (GR) rising and the economic downturn. He also stated that there was no direct correlation between the rise in unemployment and child abuse.

Commissioner Williams inquired if there was a correlation with general neglect and Trish Ploehn replied that no correlation was found. However, they did find a direct correlation with child abuse and neglect and when these people have exhausted their resources, swallowed their pride, and have gone to seek help and are then turned away or denied. This is when the frustration rises to a dangerous level and triggers abuse or neglect. In trying to prepare for this, they have been working on a waiver reinvestment plan. They are working to strengthen the infrastructure of community based providers. When denied government assistance, people should be given a list of other service providers in the community such as food banks, work force training, child care, etc. Trish Ploehn, DCFS Director, and Philip Browning, DPSS Director, are working together on how to connect this population to the needed services. By dedicating more resources to strengthen the existing infrastructure of community based providers and integrating these providers into each DPSS office, they will help to prevent DPSS clients that are denied assistance from becoming future DCFS clients. Commissioner Rudnick stated that this is a primary prevention strategy.

Chair Sorkin brought up the issue of the Commission's accountability and the role of the consumer. She stated that the Commission is working on prevention, permanency, reunification and relative care and values the input of consumers. The Commission met and heard the issues and frustrations of relative caregivers and sent its findings and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors. They have heard parents with visitation and reunification issues and have brought these issues to the attention of DCFS. Her concern is that if everyone is subject to accountability, including DPSS, who is in charge of CalWORKS and could send people to substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence services. This could be a part of primary prevention but how many people are being identified and how many are actually utilizing these services. How can the Commission discuss the frustrations of relative caregivers or parents trying to reunify but have lost the resources to do so? Mr. Santana applauded that direct approach and offered his help to facilitate their work together.

Mr. Santana stated that if not for the stimulus package, Los Angeles County would be making dramatic layoffs. The stimulus package provided an increase in the federal portion of health care services, which in turn decreases the County portion. This provided money for the recent increases in GR, CalWORKS and In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) programs. However, this is only a temporary fix for 18 months. They are now looking at how to change daily operations to work within a \$200 million deficit in the County general fund.

The stimulus also provided \$12.4 million for homeless prevention in Los Angeles County. One of the proposals they are working on is how to move this relatively flexible money to other areas. Mr. Santana mentioned an article in the L.A. Times last Sunday that discussed the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool. The article stated how technology is helping but the instincts of Social Workers are critical in delivering the services. It cited a case of a mother of 3 children under the age of 7. This mother left her children alone to go to work. The Social Worker used the SDM tool and her own instincts and made the determination to remove the children from the home until the mother addresses her child care needs and her relapse to addiction. As a result of the children being taken away, the mother's CalWORKS and Section 8 housing were taken away. The Social Worker now works with the mother to come up with a plan to get her children back but she has no stable home, stable income, or child care and she is on the verge of homelessness. Using the homeless prevention money from the stimulus, they will work with the mother to subsidize housing for 3-6 months while she works on fixing her issues. This will give her the opportunity to stabilize her situation while still having a place to live and possibly having her children returned to her.

Commissioner Friedman stated that his would be a good story to present to President Obama when he visits Los Angeles on Thursday.

Chair Sorkin inquired how we are going to work together. How do we work together to improve the lives of the children in greatest need? How can we be accountable to ourselves and the families we serve? Commissioner Curry inquired what the method is going to be to work on the 5 focus areas across the clusters.

Mr. Santana stated that the basic common ground is that we all care about the children. Despite disagreements on issues, this is the base to build upon. Mr. Santana stated that he does not deliver services; it is up to the Department Heads to deliver services. His job is to facilitate integration, to bring in resources, to hold the Department Heads accountable, and at times to defend them. Mr. Santana stated that he would recommend the Department Heads assign a point person to work with a point person from the Commission and one from the CEO on each of the 5 focus areas to develop a permanent plan with recommendations and outcomes.

Commissioner Rudnick suggested having the same people attend the meetings throughout the process and having someone assigned with some authority. Mr. Santana agreed to having the same person assigned throughout and to empower the staff attending.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired if there are existing groups that the Commission would join and what would be the mandate of the group, what would happen to the output of the group's work?

Mr. Santana responded that there are some existing groups working on these areas that the Commission would join and the output of the group would be to 1) set focus; 2) plan where they are going and how to get there; 3) present plan to other Commissions, CEO, and the Board of Supervisors; 4) realistic timeframes.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton requested clarification regarding the structure of the workgroups and whether the groups are pre-existing groups or are they creating new groups. Mr. Santana clarified that there are some existing groups but some new groups may need to be formed where there is no existing group.

Commissioner Biondi questioned how to get the cooperation from the other clusters. Mr. Santana reassured the Commission that all the DCEOs work very well together and support each others programs.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired about the PEI money and the lack of advocacy for where the neediest children are. She stated there are problems with SPA 6 getting enough funds and there are struggles with disproportionality. Mr. Santana responded that part of the problem is that we are not integrated. He suggested that if all of the commissions dealing with children get together and layout a blueprint separating jurisdictions of responsibilities, then the CEO can partner with them, they need a county strategy.

Vice Chair Curry stated that all of the children's commissions are unique and doing completely different work. They are looking at areas that may crossover or overlap. Mr. Santana reiterated his agreement to partner with the Commission.

Mr. Santana will follow-up with a letter to the Commission within 7 days confirming his understanding of how they are going to work together. He will describe what the CEO's role will be, who the staff assigned will be, and what areas they are currently working on. He would also like to have a response letter from the Commission, within 7 days, describing what they see their role being and who their point people are for these areas. If there are discrepancies, he will return at the next Commission meeting, for 20 minutes, to discuss it.

Vice Chair Olivas confirmed that the Commission's willingness to work together on developing the subgroups and looks to the CEO for support and guidance on issues that go beyond one cluster and to help facilitate working across clusters. He also recognized the work his fellow Commissioners put into establishing these focus areas.

Mr. Santana requested information indicating how the Commission partners with other children's commissions, which Commissions do what, how they work collectively, what is entirely separate, and where there are redundancies.

With respect to working with the other Commissions, Chair Sorkin indicated that for more than 10 years this Commission has worked in partnership with the Mental Health and Probation Commissions. For example, the BEST ARTS (Building Educational Success Though the Arts) will convene its 10th conference on April 18, 2009. This conference was started by the Commission and the Mental Health Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Marjorie Shelvey, Legal Aid Foundation, stated that the advocates work closely with Trish Ploehn, DCFS Director, and Philip Browning, DPSS Director and have found that the problem is not the issues, but the solutions not getting down to the front line workers. For example, two problem areas are: 1) non-needy relative caregivers getting CalWorks for the children in their care that do not qualify for foster care; 2) needy relative caregivers that are getting foster care or SSI that can't get CalWorks for themselves. In the DPSS offices, they are received with a very unwelcome atmosphere. In both departments, there is a tendency to deny.

Follow-Up

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton requested that the Public Comments regarding relative caregivers be sent to the Relative Caregiver Committee for follow-up and possibly invite the speaker back to address these issues.

Ms. Shelvey also referenced Mr. Santana's comment on people not being desperate enough for CalWorks. She inquired why doesn't the CalWorks office inform clients that they may still be able to receive Food Stamps or Medi-Cal. Also, DPSS does not ask clients about domestic violence, where there are exceptions for receiving benefits. Ms. Shelvey also replied to the comment of Food Stamp recipients buying fried chicken and donuts. She stated that this is about wellness and obesity; they buy fried chicken and donuts because it is cheaper to fill up their children.

Chair Sorkin discussed an article in the L.A. Times that the California Endowment went to South Los Angeles to teach people how to go to the grocery store and read labels as a prevention tool. She stated that 60% of all cancers are preventable with just lifestyle changes.

VIII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Trish Ploehn, DCFS Director gave an update on the gang violence reduction strategy in Los Angeles County with the LAPD, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD), Probation, DCFS, and the CEO. All these departments have assigned a full-time staff member to focus on four locations in Los Angeles County to look at gang violence suppression, as well as prevention. The locations are: 1) Monrovia-Duarte area, DCFS is the lead; 2) Pacoima, Probation is the lead; 3) Florence-Firestone, LASD is the lead; 4) Harbor-Gateway, LAPD is the lead. They are just beginning to convene stakeholder meetings in the community to discuss what they can and should be doing around gang violence. Some of the current participants include: YMCA Boys and Girls Clubs, LAUSD, and other school districts.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired if the gang strategy looks at prevention. Many families look for ways to keep their children from getting involved in gangs. Ms. Ploehn replied that the gang violence strategy is about prevention, intervention, re-entry, community engagement, and suppression.

Commissioner Biondi stated that this is not included in the County Strategic Plan; it is a County-wide initiative.

Follow-Up

Commissioner Savelle requested the contact information for the DCFS staff person assigned to the gang violence reduction group. Ms. Ploehn requested that she e-mail Nancy Castilla, DCFS for the information.

Ms. Ploehn also informed the Commission of the re-signing of an agreement with the court, the Mexican Consulate General, and DCFS to offer parenting classes to Spanish speaking clients of DCFS free of charge at the consulate office with the hope of expanding to other locations throughout the county.

Ms. Ploehn also discussed the positive outcomes in Los Angeles County and the many inquiries they receive of how they have achieved these outcomes. Ms. Ploehn informed the Commission of The National Governors Association that Casey Family Programs is hosting. There are six states involved: Arkansas, Florida, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. These states were brought together in an effort to come up with strategies for the safe reduction of children in care. Dr. Sanders, of Casey Family Programs, indicated to Ms. Ploehn that when asked where they wanted to go or what they wanted to see, they primarily wanted to come to Los Angeles and see what we are doing here. They will be coming to Los Angeles for two days in June and Ms. Ploehn asked the Commission to be a part of their visit. Ms. Ploehn stated that she really wants them to see the political strategies of the Commission as they are one of the biggest proponents of pushing things through the County and would especially like them to see the part of integration.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton stated that when making the presentation of the relationship between the current economy and the drop of abuse cases, it is important that they state that

this is a previously unidentified population. Ms. Worthy-Clayton stated that there is a new population of poor that doesn't fit the old poverty definition, this population is those that have never come in for assistance before and are victims of the current economic situation. Ms. Ploehn replied that she believes that this is related to the diminishing of hope. When a person is unemployed for the first time and receiving unemployment benefits, they have hope. As time goes by and the unemployment benefits run out and as you get turned down for assistance, you lose hope.

Commissioner Kleinberg stated that there is a part of this that has not been addressed and that is the number of young girls that are becoming pregnant, or those young people that have never been employed. They are not included in the unemployment numbers.

IX. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Bonnie Armstrong, of Casey Family Programs, discussed that what is looked at nationally, as well as locally, is what the drivers are. What has been found is that it is more about the practice in the child welfare system than it is about the unemployment numbers or poverty numbers. It is about what you do when those families come to you for help. She congratulated the Commission for helping to create an environment in Los Angeles to prevent families from entering the system and children from going into foster care. She stated that it is important to continue discussions to get the community resources to maintain this lack of correlation to get these families help in the community.

X. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XI. ADJOURN

Commissioner Sorkin adjourned the meeting.